



News Release

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West Nile virus: Nine new human cases confirmed in Washington

Positive test results bring 2009 total to 10, state's highest figure ever

OLYMPIA — U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) testing has confirmed nine more human cases of West Nile virus in Washington, bringing the state's total for the year to 10. Until now, 2008's count of three had been the state's highest yearly human total since the virus first appeared in Washington early this decade.

All nine cases were in people who were exposed in Eastern Washington between July 11 and August 12. Four live in Yakima County, three in Benton County, one in Grant County, and one in Whatcom County. The person from Whatcom County was bitten by mosquitoes while camping in Benton County.

"Summer is nearly over, but West Nile virus season is still going strong so people should not let their guard down," said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. "As long as mosquitoes are out people can get bitten and infected. That's why it is important to prevent bites by using repellent and wearing long sleeves and long pants when you're outside and mosquitoes are active."

Of those sickened, one is a man from Yakima County in his 80s. The rest are females. Most are 50 or older, although one is a teenager from Whatcom County, and another from Yakima County is in her 30s. No deaths have been reported.

Not all of the confirmed cases specifically recall mosquito bites, but the Eastern Washington residents live in areas with known West Nile-positive mosquito activity nearby.

That's significant because the best way to battle the mosquito-borne virus is to keep from getting bitten. Make sure windows and screens are tight, try to stay inside at dusk and dawn, wear long sleeves and trousers whenever possible, and use effective mosquito repellents.

Standing water is mosquito habitat, so clean out gutters, empty out buckets and other containers, make sure water in birdbaths and fountains is kept fresh, and fix leaky outdoor faucets and sprinklers.

Although West Nile exposure will end for the year when cold weather sets in, mosquitoes are expected to be active for several more weeks.

The ages of those affected reflect the group most often affected by West Nile. Anyone can get it, but those 50 and over are considered at highest risk. Most people who are infected with West Nile virus won't get sick. A few will develop severe symptoms such as headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis, and coma. In rare cases, it can be fatal. People with symptoms should contact a health care provider.

Washington's first confirmed human West Nile case this year was in a Klickitat County man in his 50s who was diagnosed earlier this summer. He is recovering. The virus has also been detected in horses and birds, nearly all of them in Eastern Washington.

The CDC is continuing to test some Washington samples, but now that Washington has 10 confirmed cases the state Public Health Laboratories at Shoreline will also be able to do confirmatory testing.

Detailed information is on the Department of Health's [West Nile virus](#) page. People may [report dead birds](#) online.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for a healthy dose of information.
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